Frank Slide - Constable R.C.S. Hawkins

In the early hours of Sep. 29th 1903, Frank was a sunken mining town situated at the ft. of Turtle Mt. — an almost perpendicular mass of limestone rising over 7000 ft. above the plain. Only a reduced maintenance crew of 19 men had turned out for the "graveyard" shift, & at 4:10 A.M. all other inhabitants of the little village were peacefully sleeping, quite unconscious of the great catastrophe soon to fall.

Suddenly & without warning, the top & north side of Turtle Mt. seemed to topple over & slide down on the sleeping village below. Millions of tons of limestone covering an expanse of well over a sq. mile thundered down, completely blotting out the east end of the village & several neighbouring ranches.

The harsh rumble could be heard for miles round. Many of the sleeping inhabitants of Frank & Blairmore were awakened. Rescue parties immediately were organized, & the work of searching for the 19 entombed miners & other survivors began. Searchers soon secured the entire slide, locating many badly injured survivors. Many were dead, badly battered by the devastating force of the rock. Many others were buried for eternity under the grey mass.

Several miraculous escapes are recounted as authentic. The Leitch family were asleep when the slide took place, & their house was completely obliterated by the face of rock. Searchers found the sergeant daughter — Marion — perfectly safe & unharmed; perched on top of one of the boulders! Sam Ennis was awakened by the grind & crash of the slide, & found himself pinned under the timbers of his house. With considerable difficulty he extricated himself & effected the rescue of his wife & children from the completely demolished house. The only injury sustained was by Mrs. Leitch — a broken collar bone.

Other tales are told of houses being cut in 2, with the occupants safe in one part of the house.

of the 19 were at work on the mine, one hut 2, reached safety. Survivors of the party where interviewed stated that they believed at the time that the mine had caved in. After the slide, they began searching for another exit, reaching the surface about 5 a.m. of April 29. Instead of peaceful bower, they were greeted by a great expanse of jumbled & twisted rock. The 2 missing miners never were located.

For weeks following the slide the column of dust remained suspended in the air. Loud rumbles from the lesser slides created the impression of an active volcano. At a distance of a mile conversation in a normal tone of voice was impossible, it was necessary to shout in order to make oneself heard at even a few ft.

Many deeds of heroism were perpetrated during the slide, but it is the writer's belief that the most outstanding was that of D. Sid Choquette, a C.P.R. Trainman.

A C.P.R. freight-train had just passed Turtle Mt. when the great mass hurled down. Aware of the fact that the Spokane Flyer was due shortly from the East, Choquette volunteered to cross the sea of rock & flag the train. Only in this way could the train's destruction be avoided. Clambering over huge rocks towards other unknown dangers, Choquette finally crossed the slide, expecting every moment to be buried by more rock. He traversed the pile in sufficient time to signal the train & save many lives.

At the present time the Frank slide is a great interest to tourists coming to the Crow's Nest Pass. The main highway & the Kettle Valley Line of the C.P.R. both pass thru the slide, & afford a great opportunity for visitors to study the greatest land slide in Canada – if not in the world.

In the course of the construction of a certain portion of the railway 3 unidentified skeletons were unearthed. These were buried with all due respect. A green & white picket fence was constructed round the graves, bearing the inscription

"Here Lie The Remains of Some of the Victims of the Frank Slide April 29, 1903".

To the left, at the greatest distance, although some 400 ft lower than before the slide, there is an imposing sight. A great white scar is discernible where the face of rock broke loose. Geologists claim that another slide will upset the tranquility of Frank, Alberta.

Many stories are told in regard to a dog having been heard. A story current among "old timers" who were in the slide, however, deals with the feelings of a horse toward man, & befitting conclusion to this article -

Entombed with the party in the mine were 10 mine horses, which had to remain in the mine when the men dug their way to the surface. Nothing could be done for these horses till the mine shafts was cleared some 29 days later. When the rescue party entered the mine they encountered a sad sight. At intervals, horses were located which had died from starvation & thirst. The wood on the cars together with the props had been chewed away by the starving animals in search of food.

With the exception of one, all of the horses were dead. This horse was lodged between a car & the ribs of the entrance. Only a faint spark of life remained, which the rescue workers were determined to keep alight. After much effort the horse was induced to take a few sips of water, after which it managed to take some gruel laced with brandy. This seemed to give the horse new life, for it succeeded in lifting its head

The rescue party then left the mine in search of blankets to keep the horse warm, as it also was necessary to move the animal. As the party withdrew, they heard several faint, plaintive neighs, which as they drew farther away grew fainter, until finally they ceased.

where they returned in 10 minutes time the horse was dead. Ask any "old timer" why the animal died, & he will answer "It died of a broken heart. It grieved he was being left alone in the cold, dark mine again, & he passed out."

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